
2012 List of State Identified Priority and Focus Schools

The Background:

In February 2012, Tennessee was awarded Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waivers providing relief from the No Child Left Behind Adequate Yearly Progress model. Through Tennessee's application for flexibility, the state created a new accountability system at both the district and school level.

The new accountability system has two overriding objectives: growth for all students, every year and closing achievement gaps by ensuring faster growth for those students who are furthest behind. These objectives are partially accomplished by holding districts and schools accountable for absolute performance. Districts are accountable to achieve their "annual measurable objectives" (AMOs) and to support their schools in achieving school AMOs.

In addition, the state identifies individual schools based upon relative performance measures. Tennessee's relative accountability system is designed to drive increased performance in chronically low performing schools and the schools with the largest achievement gaps in the state. These schools are categorized as "priority" schools and "focus" schools. Priority schools are schools in the bottom five percent of overall performance across tested grades and subjects. These schools will face one of four interventions: 1) placement in the Achievement School District (ASD), 2) turnaround under the governance of an LEA innovation zone, 3) turnaround through one of the federal School Improvement Grant plans, subject to state approval; or 4) LEA-led school improvement planning processes, subject to direct ASD intervention in the absence of improved results. Focus schools are 10 percent of schools with the largest achievement gaps, subgroup performance below a five percent proficiency threshold, or high schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent. Focus schools will be eligible to apply for grants aimed at dramatically closing the achievement gap. Schools not awarded a competitive grant will be provided state resources to close their achievement gaps.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends adoption of these lists on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

The List will be available at the Meeting